

MISSOURI CONSERVATION SHOWCASE

Hunters Seeing Positive Impact of Conservation Security Program

By Bill White, Missouri Department of Conservation

The newest program in the suite of Farm Bill programs available in Missouri is the Conservation Security Program (CSP). CSP provides incentives for ag producers to address natural resource concerns on their farms. The more resources addressed, the higher the

incentive. Due to limited funding since 2004, the program has only been offered in seven watersheds in Missouri. But, from a wildlife standpoint, CSP has changed the landscape in such intensive agricultural regions as the Bootheel and mid-Missouri. An estimated 15 million linear feet of native grass field borders and an estimated 50,000 acres of rice field reflooding for migrating waterfowl has been established in the program. No other program has made this much of a difference for wildlife in such a short amount of time and in such a small geography. Just think of the habitat that could be in place today if enough money was available to apply this program statewide.



Mike Riley, left, Brian Shelton, center, and Patrick Hulshof examine a quail during a hunt on Hulshof's CSP land in Scott County.

Scott County ag producer Patrick Hulshof says CSP should play a bigger role in the Farm Bill. "The CSP allows farmers to make a difference on the landscape for natural resources. And that is a part of the Farm Bill that gives the American taxpayers something to show for their money," he says.

(continued)

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~ Mike Riley, quail hunter



Hulshof has used CSP to address water quality with precision agriculture techniques and more efficient irrigation systems. He addresses erosion with minimum-tillage techniques and addresses wildlife by planting field borders and center pivot corners to wildlife friendly grasses. Hulshof has witnessed the amazing quail response to the new habitat. “When we are working the fields we are seeing quail everywhere,” he says

“Initially, Patrick was not as interested in what CSP could do for quail but what CSP could do to

help with applying variable rate nutrient application technology to his cropland,” says Brian Shelton who works for Hulshof. But, now that Patrick has seen the quail response, he has gotten so excited that he joined Quail Unlimited and is keeping up with management of the CSP wildlife cover for the quail. He has hunted quail more the past few weeks than he has in the past five years.”

Local quail hunter Mike Riley provided the dogs for an exceptional quail hunt of CSP cover in the Bootheel. “Before CSP came along I would find a covey during a typical half day hunt,” he says. Riley was excited upon finding three and four coveys in recent half-day hunts. “The average size of the coveys before CSP was about eight birds, but today we are seeing mostly 15 bird coveys,” Riley says.

One of the best times of this hunting experience was at the end of the day, when we found single birds scattered out over eight weedy acres of a center pivot irrigation corner which was planted to strips of native grass and food plots. It took us over 30 minutes to move through that small triangle of

habitat, because Riley's English pointers probably pointed 10 different times on single birds. Too bad our shooting did not match the dog's hunting ability. But according to Riley the dogs are used to it! We got back to the truck all smiles, from a great end to a great hunt.

On each farm that we hunted we found birds and we found the first covey within the first 15 minutes of hunting on all but one farm. We averaged about one covey for each hour of hunting. As a comparison, the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) surveys from Southeast Missouri in the mid-1940s found that hunters averaged five covey flushes per eight-hour hunting day. CSP has made great strides to get us back to the way it was.

Hulshof and Shelton plan to further improve the habitat provided by CSP with edgefeathering in adjacent fencerows and woodlands. Without CSP, Patrick Hulshof would not have a newfound interest in quail and would not be thinking about what else he could do to help quail on his farm. Many other CSP participants feel the same way. A Saline County CSP farmer told MDC staff during a quail workshop that "I am managing for quail because of the CSP program. Had I not enrolled in the program, I would not be doing anything for quail."

Bill White is Private Lands Program Manager for the Missouri Department of Conservation.

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CSP or NRCS programs, contact
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